



"EMPOWERING CHOICES" SCENARIO SUMMARY

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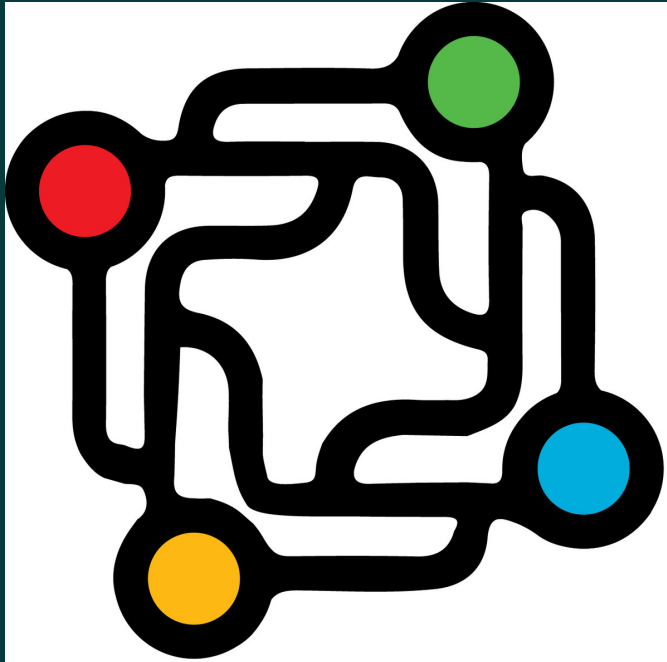
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LEVERAGE POINTS

FLINT

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INTRODUCTION

Building on four years of participatory data collection with collaborators in Flint, the research team of the Flint Leverage Points Project (FLPP) hosted a scenario planning workshop in October 2022 at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. A scenario planning workshop is a place where community members and researchers work together to co-create scenarios for the future, based on previously community defined values and leverage points. A scenario is a narrative description of actionable pathways towards an equitable, sustainable and just food system in Flint, 20 years from now (2042).

This document summarizes one of the four scenarios that were co-created during the workshop. Each scenario uses a different Big Vision, or key finding from the research project as the starting point. The Big Visions is illustrated as an infographic and is followed by a summary of the co-created scenario. Here, we present the "Empowering Choices" scenario that was developed based on the "Resident Food Empowerment" Big Vision.

To access the full report documenting the summary of all four scenarios, each scenario individually, or the workbook we used for workshop facilitation visit:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood/resources-and-publications/scenarios-for-the-future-of-the-flint-food-system-visions-for-2042>

Background on the Flint Leverage Points Project (FLPP)

The Flint Leverage Points Project (2018-2023) was a collaboration between community partners and researchers to find ways to change the food system in Flint so that it is more equitable, healthy, and sustainable. The Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) partnered with Michigan State University (MSU) to conduct this research. We were advised by a Community Consultative Panel (CCP) comprised of representatives from the Flint community who work with food in Flint. We conducted research on the food system in Flint (including production, distribution, preparing, eating and recycling food) to find improvements that can benefit Flint residents. We identified strengths and opportunities within the food system that could be built upon. This project produced an analysis of how community partners and other stakeholders can intervene in the Flint food system to create positive change. This report is part of that work: an overview of four actionable scenarios.

For more on the Flint Leverage Points Project, and project results visit: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood>

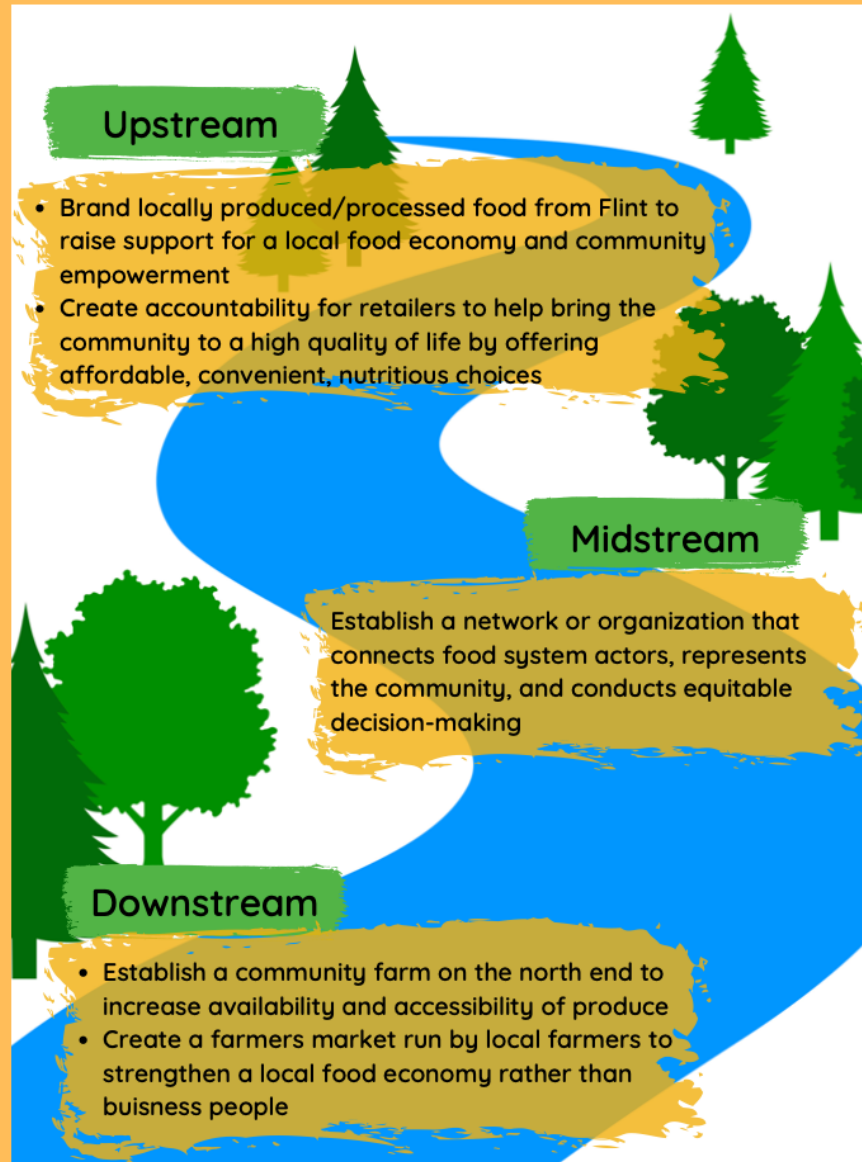


BIG VISION: RESIDENT FOOD EMPOWERMENT

Resident Food Empowerment

Desirable Future: With increased resident direction, control, and ownership, the food system improves food access to achieve equity, social, and economic justice for residents.

Example leverage points defined by community members are listed below. Join the conversation--detailed lists of more leverage points can be found at: www.canr.msu.edu/FlintFood



Currently: Focus on emergency food and meeting immediate needs limits work that will transform the food system and achieve equity and food sovereignty.

Definitions:

Upstream: Policies, laws, or regulations that improve community conditions, creating system-wide changes

Midstream: Barriers that need to be addressed in order for the system to evolve; and/or supports individual social needs

Downstream: Addresses individual needs and crisis management

Each scenario uses a different Big Vision as the starting point: a community defined desirable future with example leverage points. Big Visions represent key findings from this research. For a full list of participant generated leverage points associated with this Big Vision visit

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood/resources-and-publications/key-lessons-synthesizing-research-results>

"EMPOWERING CHOICES"

big Vision: This scenario was developed using the "Resident Food Empowerment" vision and associated leverage points as a starting point. Use of quotation marks indicates a direct quote from a workshop participant.

Summary of "Empowering Choices" scenario

The goal of this scenario is keeping people engaged in eating healthier foods through cooking, gardening, and shopping. We will do this by ensuring a variety of foods and food processing and cooking equipment is available, sharing community knowledge, and ensure overall community value of food that respects quality of life for all involved in the food system. To achieve this we will engage in gathering resident participation, ongoing evaluation of community needs and resources and ensuring choices are appealing to residents. By 2042, when the scenario is achieved, the food available in Flint is reflective of community desires and needs. The choices of food available meet desires/needs so that people are empowered to cook, garden, and make healthy choices. The process of food system change helps people understand the urgency to make change while understanding the reality of daily life, so people can continue these activities far into the future.

Values: Community priorities that guide the scenario

All the listed values are important to recognize and highlight. Participants decided to emphasize: 1) available foods, 2) quality of life is respected, and 3) sharing knowledge. The value of sharing knowledge replaced education. Participants want to shift from a discourse of "right and wrong" to discourse acknowledging that everyone has something to contribute, and interventions will be more successful if they are community led and fun.

Location:
City of Flint

Short-term actions: What steps should be integrated into this scenario in the next 0-10 years to help reach big vision?

The short-term actions are outlined below in no hierarchical order:

- Fostering more opportunities for school gardening: Kids need to be involved and excited about food systems change, and can be important drivers of change at home. To support teachers, this needs to be incorporated into a larger educational structure supported and built into the curriculum
- Supporting the North Flint Food Co-Op: Ensuring the co-op stocks healthy foods that residents within a 2-mile radius of the store want and know how to use. Recognizing and emphasizing that food co-ops runs differently than a big box store like Meijer. Educating residents about the benefits of the food co-op is critical. The co-op is here for the community and can serve in many ways—it's not just a grocery store.

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Short-term actions (cont.): What steps should be integrated into this scenario in the next 0-10 years to help reach big vision?

- Envisioning a 21st century Home Economics Class: Many cooking and eating healthy skills must be taught. These are skills entwined with managing a household budget, understanding what a meal costs, and where foods come from. Managing a food budget and thinking about how that fits in with the remaining household expenditures, knowing how food is made, and how to shop for healthy food on a budget are important skills. Bringing these skills back into junior and high school classrooms is an important step to helping students learn broader life skills
- Community Food Spaces: Cooking and preserving food often takes specialized tools to which many families do not have access. To address this, creating a community space for shared tool and material rental would be helpful. A community freezer space (similar to the model of community garden spaces) will help support families in their efforts to access produce at its peak and save it for later consumption. This can cut down on food waste and encourage families to buy produce at its freshest and lowest price.

RESOURCES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Resources: What resources are needed to complete these actions?

- Community Members
- Public schools • Media
- Flint Neighborhoods United
- Food processing equipment
- Space to house the community freezer
- Funding for programs • Home visitors
- Networks of Farmers and Chefs
- Farmer liaison/ coordinator position
- Community food system volunteer coordinator
- Hurley Medical Center
- Crim Fitness Foundation

Stakeholders: Who should be involved?
Which community partners and organizations are needed to do this work?

- Community members and resident support is most important!
- Hurley Medical Center
- Crim Fitness Foundation
- Flint Neighborhoods United
- Schools • Churches • Media
- Edible Flint • Volunteers • Farmers

Surprises:

Another health emergency or recession

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Long-term actions: What should be integrated into this scenario in 11-20 years to help reach the big vision?

- Flint Food Co-op Satellite Locations: Assuming that the North Flint Food Co-op will be a success, it can serve as a model for how to create other neighborhood food co-ops or satellite locations across Flint. Eventually, Flint should be a national leader using the food co-op model to bring fresh and healthy foods to neighborhoods previously labeled food deserts. Scaling up to other cities will support families nationwide, and raise the credibility and success of Flint.
- Food Quality Awards: The newly formed Food Policy Council could help create awards that highlight and support food businesses. It is not always possible to call out stores that are problematic or selling produce that looks bad, but it is possible to elevate those stores that are providing quality products and embodying Flint food system values. Such awards could involve an event and social media/advertising to benefit businesses. This creates accountability for stores and can help boost business.
- Personal Chef Home Visiting Program: Drawing on successful models of home visiting nurses and home visiting in early childhood education, a personal chef home visiting program can help promote cooking and healthy eating. Key benefits include teaching families specific skills and ensuring that the visiting chef is working in a family's space with their existing tools and equipment, and helping families to feel special and empowered to make high quality foods in their own homes.
- Farmer to Consumer Connections: Helping consumers access farmers is an important part of linking consumers to other parts of the food system. Pictures of farmers by their products in stores helps customers see who grew their food. It can also support consumers moving away from the idea that food has to look identical and perfect. A farmer liaison or representative who is particularly skilled at outreach and communication would be good for connecting with the community, and translating the work of farmers to consumers.
 - "Maybe, we'll get to a place in 20 years where people accept like, 'Yeah, carrots look like that. Or maybe, my apple has a mark on it.'...I think that the more that people hear from farmers about what farmers do, why farmers do it, how they do it, and are involved in growing, cooking, and processing food themselves, they'll see that it's not just these perfectly proportioned things that we are accustomed to... And, I love that, like pointing to the farmer's face, and be like, "This person grew this, and you can talk to them about it."
 - "And, that's a big part of what I'm really excited...is being able to bring farmers and non-farmers together. Let's just talk about how you grow food."

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Pros and Cons

Pros

- Eating healthy becomes a habit
- Flint residents live healthier lives
- Families are doing exercising, cooking, and learning together
- Flint is known for celebrating food
- People make connections between farmers, stores and consumers
- There is broader food accessibility across neighborhoods

Cons

- People do not like these solutions, or they won't use them
- Infrastructure and behavior change takes time
- Expensive, on-going costs
- Instability of long-term funding and political leadership

Channels and Walls

Channels

- Jobs and employment opportunities contributes to offering families more food choice, but can also help lift people out of poverty.

Walls

- Low participation levels in activities and in shopping at the food co-op.
- Siloing of work, and preventing people from collaboration.
- Funding
- Ensuring initiatives are connected, there is transparent communication, and individuals are not overburdened.
- Supporting community holistically, and in particular supporting mental health is important to this broader food systems work.

Evaluation

- Measure the usage freezers and tool rental, and who is using these resources
- Evaluation of school-based programs and the levels of participation
- Have participants tell their story through sharing pictures, artwork, and words that illustrate their success
- More people are willing to share their knowledge and work on community projects—so there is a larger total number of people involved and active in this work
- Programs outlined in the scenario are launched and there is program evaluation with participants and program users
- Data from stores will demonstrate an increase in produce purchases and purchases of local foods

Broader Impacts

- Flint becomes a more desirable place to move to and people want to stay. This can be a benefit to the community as a whole; however, growth changes community dynamics in unforeseen ways.
- Supporting home ownership supports the food system as a whole. If too many people are renting, then it is less likely people have the equipment needed for food prep
- Ensuring that growth and development do not increase gentrification that recreates racial inequities

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We thank you for your participation and ongoing work to improve the food system in Flint, Michigan!

Contact

For questions about the FLPP, contact Damon Ross (CFGF) at dross@cfgf.org or Chelsea Wentworth (MSU) at wentwo21@msu.edu



Photo Credit: FLPP Research Participant

How to Cite this Report

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